

gape was rich scarlet red. Wings were short and tail feathers undeveloped. It was weakly calling *chee, chee*, the call becoming harsher on the arrival of the foster parents. Almost every five minutes it was being fed by the female sunbird. The female was seen picking up something from near the acacia blossom. Evidently it could not be nectar for there is none in babul flowers. She was, however, observed to be bringing in nectar from the loranthus flowers. The female would sit by the side of the chick and feed it by inserting its beak into the open mandibles of the chick. The chick would quiver its wings and tail during feeding. The chick was seen flying from one tree to another within a radius of 10 to 15 feet from the nest. As the chick and the parents were not coming back to the nest, it was removed by us.

In the last week of September both the parents were seen feeding the chick; the frequency of feeding had increased to about every two minutes. Again, the sunbirds were seen pecking at tender twigs of babul. The tail of the young bird had become long and its colour lighter. The chest had become cross-barred with dark brown. The tail was also lightly barred with white and brown. It had

become more active and could fly over a greater distance.

The chick was last seen on 30th September. In size it was bigger than a redvented bulbul. In colour it was grey with a lighter chest cross-barred with dark brown. Tail feathers were long and barred with white and dark grey. Its flight was like a large grey babbler's quick wing beats followed by a glide. It was low and silent. The sunbirds were still engaged in feeding it. The chick could not be located again in the same area after 30th September.

Other birds seen nesting in the same open plot were: Ashy Wren Warbler, Tailor Bird, Whitethroated Munia, Baya Weaver Bird, and Redvented Bulbul.

The following parasitic cuckoos were seen in the vicinity of the nest: Koel (quite common), Pied Crested Cuckoo, Hawk-cuckoo (uncommon) and Plaintive Cuckoo. The last was seen perching on the bush bearing the sunbirds' nest, only once, i.e. on 23rd September.

In the second week of October a member of the Nature Club in National Defence Academy, Khadakwasla, also recorded a sunbird feeding a large bird. The NDA is situated across the river at a distance of six to seven miles from Vithalwadi.

184, SHANIWAR PETH,
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January 6, 1977.

S. INGALHALLIKAR
SANJAY KOTHARI

12. ASSISTED MIGRATION OF BIRDS BY SHIPS

On 18th September 1975, I sailed for England from Cochin as a passenger on board an Indian cargo ship. Two days out at sea from Cochin, I noticed two pairs and a single Little Brown Dove (*Streptopelia senegalensis*) on the mast of the ship. At times, the birds flew away from the

ship apparently in search of land, but returned back always. Thinking that the birds will thirst and starve to death, I put out grain and water but was told by the sailors that there was no need to do so. There were enough pickings on the aft deck outside the kitchen

where I saw the birds occasionally, and they could get fresh water from rain and dew collected in various depressions on the deck. Seven days later, when we reached Aden, the birds were still very much there. As we sighted land at dawn they flew to it but perhaps they found the treeless landscape too bleak because when we sailed from Aden the same afternoon, at least three of them were back on board. After crossing the Suez canal, the ship picked up a number of other local birds with which I was not familiar. The doves were also there but I could not get a correct tally of their number as they had numerous hide-outs on the ship: on the masts, in the crates of cargo and the machinery on the forward and aft decks. After Gibraltar it turned cold and I was not out on deck much. Even so, I noticed another addition to our floating aviary—the Robin redbreasts, but I cannot say if the doves were still on board.

At that time, I had not taken serious notice of the passage of these birds as I was told by sailors that ships often carried birds from one continent to another in this manner. At times, these birds were blown off by storms, but in good weather they travelled quite well. After reading the question raised by Mr. Horace Alexander in his note 'What leads to increases

in range of certain birds' [*J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.* 71 (3)] I suspect there is every possibility that birds carried in this manner can find a niche in a distant land and build up a local population. Before Suez reopened, Indian cargo vessels used to go from Indian ports direct to U.K. with just two refuelling stops of a few hours each, and some of these ships could have carried Collared doves mentioned by Mr. Alexander. This could equally explain the sudden appearance of the Blackthroated thrush in Norfolk reported in the June 1976 issue of the *Newsletter* for birdwatchers published from Bangalore.

On 26th May 1976, I revisited the exact port area in Cochin from where I had sailed the previous year. Despite a thorough scanning of the trees and gardens in the port area, I failed to see doves of any kind though numerous Rock pigeons had congregated over a grain godown. Later, a resident of Fort Cochin which is across the harbour told me of occasionally seeing *Streptopelia senegalensis* in her garden.

A sailor friend who is a keen bird-watcher has agreed to keep a log of passage of birds on board his ship, and I hope some more data will become available of migration of birds in this manner.

4, NATIONAL TOWER,
13, LOUDON STREET,
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January 1, 1977

ASHOKE KUMAR

[There are a number of instances of assisted passage of different species recorded in literature. Hugh Whistler noted the House Crow (*Corvus splendens*) travelling by ss. *City of Exter* on 26 April 1926 from Bombay, and leaving the ship after passing Perim on 2nd May (*J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.* 32 : 598).

Dr. C. B. Ticehurst (*The Ibis* 1923 : 466) recorded four or five of the Little Brown Dove

coming aboard his ship quite exhausted on March 25th, 1918, when the ship was about 10 miles off Karachi, and remaining until she reached harbour. He suggested that they may have been oversea migrants of the race *ermanni*. The recoveries of birds of the species ringed during the Society's banding programme lends support to this view—a little Brown Dove (Ring B-1062) ringed on 15.iii.1961 near Bhuj (Kutch, c. 23° 10' N., 69° 50' E.) was recovered

MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

on 27.ii.1964 near Hyderabad (Pakistan, c. 25° 20'N., 68° 25'E.), c. 200 km north of the ringing place.

Derek Goodwin in the *Pigeons and Doves of the World* (Brit. Mus. 1967) gives the distribution of *Streptopelia senegalensis* as 'Africa, Arabia, India, Afghanistan and Turkestan.

Also locally in Palestine, Syria, the Lebanon, Turkey and Malta, in all these places probably as a result of human introduction as in parts of Western Australia where it is now well established'. In addition to actual 'human introduction' it appears that the Little Brown Dove has transported itself to many of these regions and has 'become adapted to a man-altered environment'.—Eds.]

13. NOTE ON THE BAYA WEAVER BIRD *PLOCEUS PHILIPPINUS* (LINN.)

Quite frequently we tend to take many of the goings on of birds and animals around us as common place and requiring no comments, and it is only years later that we find a note in a scientific journal that what we took for granted is something which ought to have been recorded ! And it is precisely this sort of reporting which has made the earlier journals such mines of information and so interesting to read.

While ruminating over Vol. 71 No. 3 of the *Journal* I read T. Anthony Davis's account on selection of Nesting Trees, etc., by this common and notoriously polygamous little bird.

Quite naturally I know this ubiquitous bird best in the Saurashtra region. My impression has been that the Baya prefers to site its nest in a tree above tall grass or rushes. The trees invariably are babools *Acacia nilotica* or wild Date Palms *Phoenix* sp. However *Prosopis spicigera* is also used. Other favoured locations are cliffs over river pools or wells with over-hanging Neem *Azadirachta indica* or any of the other common trees found growing from

crevices down the side of wells. Electricity lines passing over stands of sugarcane are also used and a line of pendent nests along these makes a remarkable sight. With the clearing of trees and consequent reduction in potential breeding sites a very interesting development appears to have taken place, at least around Rajkot. In June, flocks of Bayas, still in plain and sparrow-like plumage, invade the city. They draw attention as the yellow starts becoming more prominent, for these urban flocks are all males. Very soon, they begin to construct nests on trees and shrubs along compound walls. Decorative palms in the vicinity soon have their fronds torn to shreds as the exuberant architects start collecting material.

These attempts at developing *bastis* do not seem to be approved by the hens and, as yet not a single urban colony has progressed beyond the 'helmet' stage. By the middle of July, the birds leave the city and are not seen again with the sparrows feeding in the courtyards till the following May.

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January 6, 1977.

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